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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [GA](#)

SUBJECT: THE GAMBIA: THE INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER CLOSED,
EDITOR AND MANAGING DIRECTOR DETAINED

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Gambian security forces closed the offices of &The Independent8 newspaper and detained the newspaper,s staff for questioning on March 28. Staff members were released after questioning, with the exception of Editor-In-Chief, Musa Saidykhan, and General Manager, Madi Ceesay, who were still in detention as of March 29. To our knowledge, the newspaper,s offices remain closed and under guard by the Police Intervention Unit (PIU). Ambassador contacted Interior Minister Babucar Jatta March 29 to register concern over this incident. We will also raise with the GOTG officially. At this point we see no link between the GOTG,s move against &The Independent8 and the foiled coup attempt of March 21. Two March 27 articles critical of President Jammeh may have prompted the authorities, action.
END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Embassy sources confirmed press reports that Mr. Saidykhan was arrested by security forces that came to his house late Monday evening, March 27. On Tuesday morning, when the staff of &The Independent8 reported to work, they found the offices secured and under guard by PIU forces. The security officers brought the staff to PIU Headquarters for questioning. Most staff members were released after their positions and, if reporters, their articles were reviewed by the PIU. Saidykhan and Ceesay, however, remained in detention as of midday Wednesday, March 29. To our knowledge, no charges have been filed and no reason has been given for their detention or the closure of the offices. Staff members of &The Independent8 confirmed that the two are in detention at the Major Crimes Unit at Police Headquarters in Banjul, and that they have not been allowed access to visitors.

¶3. (SBU) In October 2005, as reported in the Annual Human Rights Report, Saidykhan was detained and questioned for several hours for security reasons. &The Independent8 also lost its printing press in 2004 in a still-unsolved arson attack.

¶4. (SBU) Ambassador contacted Interior Minister Baboucar Jatta March 29 and expressed deep concern over authorities, action against &The Independent.8 Jatta professed ignorance of the precise reasons for the GOTG,s move, but took on board Ambassador,s urging that authorities permit the newspaper,s prompt re-opening and promptly release the detainees in the absence of concrete evidence of wrongdoing by them. We will continue to register our concern over this incident to the GOTG.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: At this point, we can only speculate as to the reasons behind the closure of &The Independent8 office and the ongoing detention of the two senior staff members. So far we see no link between &The Independent8 and last week,s foiled coup. In fact, editorials have run in the paper condemning the coup. Both Ceesay (who is also the

President of the Gambian Press Union) and Saidykhan often write articles that are critical of the Gambian government and President Jammeh. It is possible that an article which ran in &The Independent& on March 27 entitled &How Wealthy is Jammeh?& may have triggered these events. The article reported statements made by opposition leader Halifa Sallah that the President appears to have more personal wealth than The Gambia,s national institutions. Also on March 27, Ceesay authored an opinion piece in &The Independent& criticizing coups, but focusing mainly on the 1994 coup that brought President Jammeh into power (text of both articles sent to AF/W).

STAFFORD